

HOW-TO GUIDE

Starting a Campus Library of Things

Center for Biological Diversity

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Center for Biological Diversity fights to protect wildlife and wild lands and to address the underlying causes of the extinction crisis, including the excessive production and consumption of new products. Libraries of Things (LoT) reduce the demand to produce new goods that destroy habitat, generate greenhouse gases, create pollution, and harm wildlife.

Over the course of a year, the Center worked with campus community members, including the University of North Florida's (UNF) Department of Housing and Residence Life, to create a LoT on the campus in Jacksonville, Florida. We created this guide for other campuses interested in starting their own LoT to provide resources to their campus community, lessen environmental impacts, and introduce students to the sharing economy. It was developed in consultation with Breadvolution, Florida Rising, Period Poverty Jax, Post Landfill Action Network, Shareable and The Yellow House.

Want to build a LoT that's not on a college campus or looking for additional information beyond this guide? Check out Shareable's Library of Things [toolkit](#).

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WHAT IS A LIBRARY OF THINGS?

A LoT is a shared community resource where useful items can be borrowed just like books that are in circulation for years. They are part of the sharing economy — a socioeconomic system where consumers share in the creation, production, distribution, trade and consumption of goods and services.

Sharing disrupts the current U.S. economic model that demands endless growth through the constant purchasing of new things. It challenges the traditional consumerist mindset that drives overproduction and leads to items getting thrown away after only a few uses.

According to [Shareable](#), an organization that collaborates to imagine, resource, network and scale cooperative projects, LoTs are a borrowing and sharing community space. LoTs hold true to the traditional mechanics of a library while pushing borrowing to a new edge. There are about 2,000 formally established LoTs around the world, as well as countless informal ones.

LoTs build community while bringing the solidarity economy and mutual aid practices to life. The solidarity economy is one that values solidarity and cooperation, equity in all dimensions, social and economic democracy, sustainability and pluralism. Environmental examples include community-supported agriculture, sharing/bartering, community owned renewable energy, land trusts, and do-it-yourself.

LoTs offer a more environmentally friendly way than consumerism to meet our material needs. Many universities already share items at the campus library, through Housing and Residence Life, or through an outdoor gear lending program.

LoTs often include:

- Art, craft and sewing items
- Durable medical equipment — canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs
- Electronics — AV, cameras, metal detectors, projectors, speakers, drones, VR
- Games/Toys — board games and video games
- Kitchenware — blenders, dehydrators, mixers, bakeware, bread/ice cream makers
- Learning items — microscopes, telescopes, robotics kits
- Musical instruments
- Party supplies — karaoke machines, popcorn poppers, decorations, corn hole
- Sport, fitness, beach and outdoor equipment
- Tools — garden, repair, apprenticeship items such as for car mechanics, hair-styling and carpentry tools

WHY START A LIBRARY OF THINGS?

There are many benefits to starting a LoT on a college campus. They strengthen community and connection through borrowing; some host classes where people share ideas and skills. They provide access to items that some may not be able to afford and can make a residence hall or apartment feel more spacious through the removal of stuff that is used infrequently.

With the rising costs of everyday items, providing for students' basic needs is more important than ever. LoTs can play a role by supplying items that everyone can use without needing to purchase them. Finally, they reduce waste and greenhouse gas emissions.

Creating a LoT is integral to avoiding rampant consumerism and waste that comes with the initial move into college. Instead of purchasing new items, students can participate in the communal sharing of stuff. For example, instead of 20 students purchasing their own vacuum, a single vacuum from the LoT can be used by everyone through sharing. For students this provides both environmental and financial relief, preventing the waste of money and resources.

For universities seeking recognition from the [Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment and Rating System](#) (STARS) from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) or for those setting consumption-related Scope 3 emissions targets, starting a LoT is a good way to meet these goals. Success in a STARS assessment provides educational institutions with a ranking showing knowledge and leadership in sustainability. A campus LoT can also be used to further zero waste behavior research that can be applied outside of higher education.

HOW TO CREATE A LIBRARY OF THINGS

1. Identify Campus Community Members

Create a list of campus officials, organizations and others who may be interested in creating a LoT or whose approval or assistance is needed to establish one. This may include the sustainability office, the main library, student government, housing and residence life, relevant student groups, and facilities. Reach out to contacts to discuss the benefits of a LoT, how one might be implemented on campus, and how they can help the project succeed.

Questions to consider:

- What are the strengths of your organizing group? Who are like-minded groups on campus?
- Where will the group need help? Who is not part of the organizing group but should be?
- Who will help launch the LoT and keep it running day to day?
- How will you acquire inventory and help fund the LoT?
- What permissions are needed to build and open a LoT?

University of North Florida Example

A Center for Biological Diversity fellow and UNF student asked Housing and Residence Life if they would be interested in cocreating LoTs. The reception was positive, and the administration decided that the LoT would serve students living on campus and be administered by Resident Assistants who work under UNF Housing and Residence Life. UNF Housing and Residence Life communicated with students to show the project was school sanctioned and build rapport and trust with those students living in residence halls.

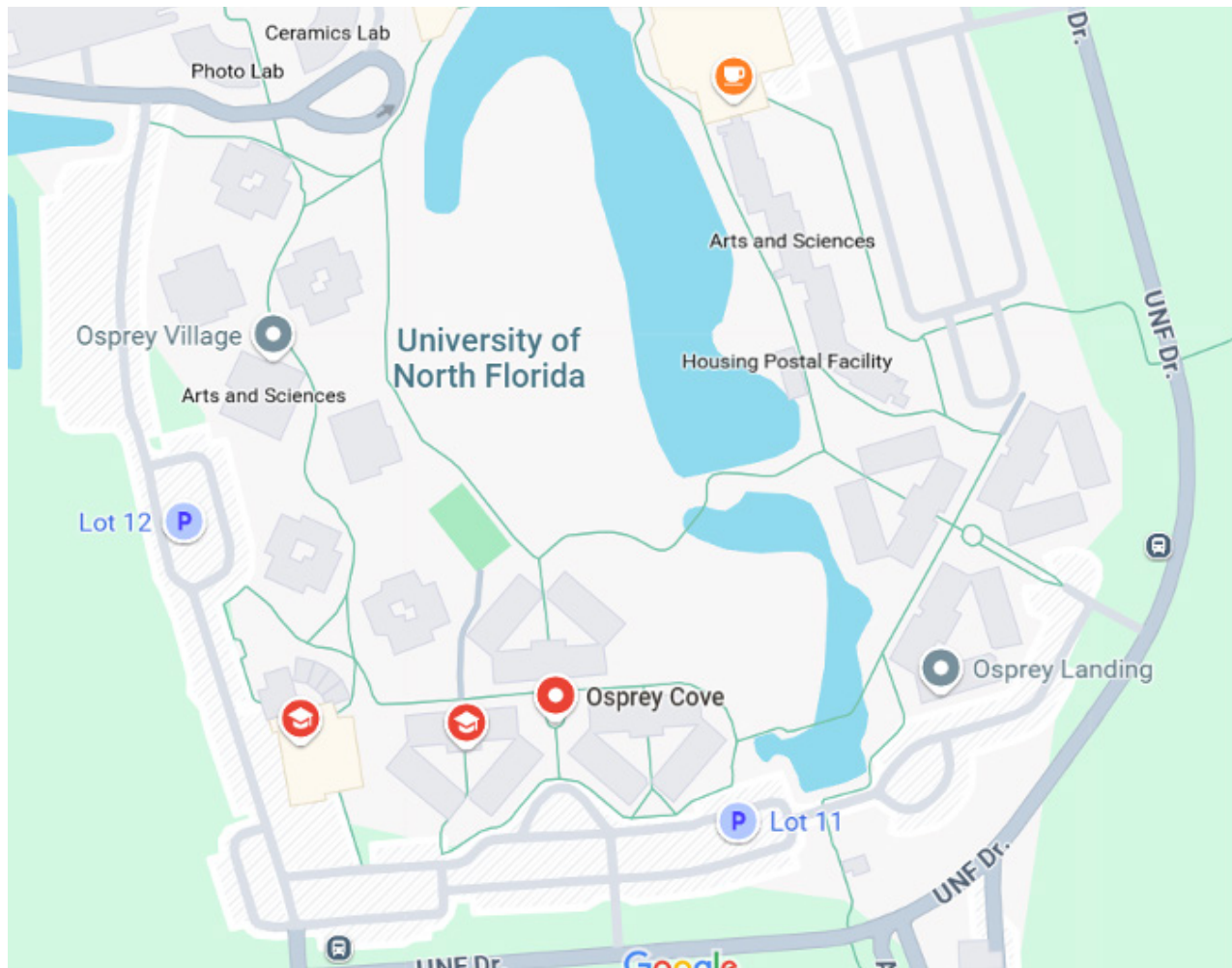


Figure 1: The three residence halls — Osprey Cove, Osprey Landing, and Osprey Village — included in the project. Credit: Google Maps

2. Conduct a Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is integral to providing useful items and to determine the best locations for new LoTs to serve the student community. Create and conduct a survey or interview students to learn which items would be most useful to include. After conducting interviews and surveys, analyze the data to pick priority items as well as identify potential locations.

Questions to consider:

- Who will the LoT serve?
- What kinds of items will it lend? What is most needed by the campus community?
- Think about how you'll store items with multiple pieces to keep them from getting separated (zip ties, carabiners, drawstring cloth bags, and toolboxes can be handy here).
- Think about how someone will transport the items from the library, be that by car, bus, bike etc.
- Will your LoT do more than lend items? Consider whether you want to also sell used items, provide repair, or host educational events.

University of North Florida Example

In-person surveys (online and printed) and informal conversations were conducted during two residence hall move-in events — one in the middle of the summer and one before the fall semester. The survey was also emailed to students by Housing and Residence Life after fall move-in. The assessment asked demographic questions as well as questions about different types of items that could be stocked to help organizers understand how a residence hall-hosted LoT might be used. The survey included a “check all that apply” question that prompted students to select all items they would like to see carried in the LoT. Prohibited items and consumable items like food and hygiene products were not included as options. ([See survey questions and responses here.](#))



Figure 2: LoT In-Person Survey Event. Credit: Kelley Dennings

3. Identify Location(s)

Create a list of potential campus LoT locations. This could be at a residence hall, with the sustainability office, in different academic departments, at the campus activities office/student union, at the gym, or in the main campus library.

Consider hours of operation, staffing and security. Consider the sharing opportunities already available on campus to understand where sharing opportunities already exist and where there are potential gaps. Once a location is identified, prepare the space so you can keep the items well organized and in good condition as soon as you start collecting them.

Questions to consider:

- What other sharing programs and mutual aid structures exist on campus?
- Where will volunteers, staff, or leaders be coming from?
- Where is space available on campus to store items? Is it suited for the type of items you want to loan (i.e. temperature controlled)? Where will check-ins and returns happen? How central is the location?
- How easy is it to get in and out of the LoT space? Is it accessible for people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices?

University of North Florida Example

During the summer months at UNF, organizers toured the campus to identify potential locations. A list of existing campus borrowing locations, such as outdoor gear from the gym and jumper cables from transportation, was mapped. Learning from these existing locations was useful. It helped identify campus sharing gaps, existing check-in and checkout systems, and provided insight into items that should be prioritized because they were not already offered elsewhere on campus.

Housing and Residence Life decided to focus on three residence halls, all near each other, to host the LoT. Storage space was limited, since much of the available shelving is reserved for mail and deliveries, but an area was carved out at each residence hall welcome desk to hold the new LoT items. Residence halls already allow students to borrow brooms, toilet plungers and a cart, and this project expanded that.

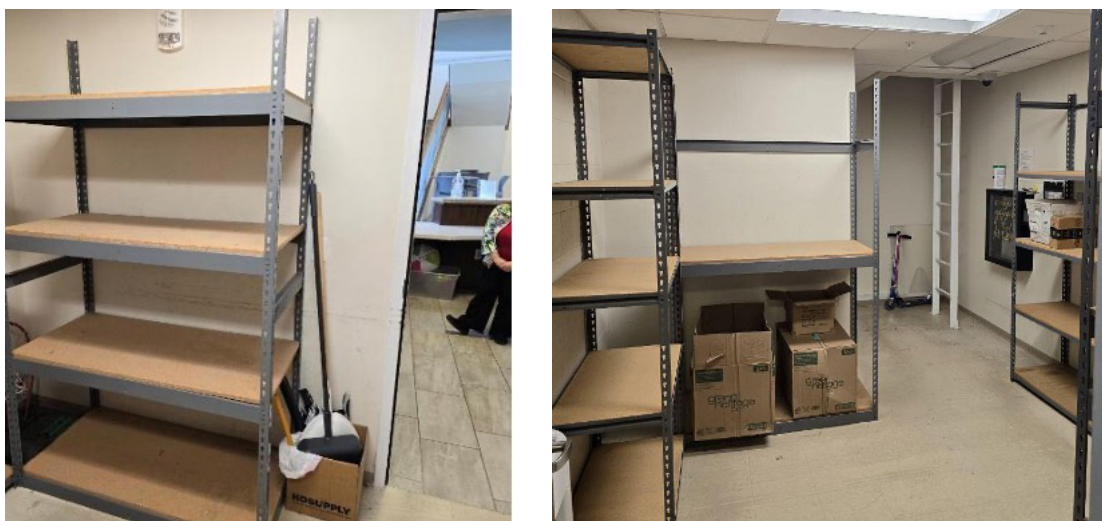


Figure 3: LoT Residence Hall Storage Area, Credit: Chandler Poole

4. Gather Items and People to Manage Inventory

Create a detailed list of items requested via the needs assessment and make sure to check with university staff that requested items are allowed (i.e. no air fryers are allowed in residence halls). If items are already provided via another campus borrowing system (i.e. graphing calculators available through the main library), decide whether it adds any value or just takes up space to also offer those items through the LoT. Once you have your final list, begin collecting inventory.

Look for nonperishable items that can be used and reused by other people. It's important that these items can be cleaned, repaired, recycled, or replaced with relative ease. Items can be acquired through gently used donations via a university move-out program, local businesses, or an email sent out to the campus community. If funding is available, used items could be purchased through online marketplaces like Etsy, Ebay, Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace

And if organizers purchase new items, make sure the products are long-lasting and sustainably made.

Decide who will manage the inventory, operating hours, and how items will be checked in and out. This could involve current paid staff already based in an office where the items will be stored or volunteers that agree to staff the LoT during certain hours. The borrowing system could be low-tech or digital, such as a free online program called MyTurn or scanned via the University's student ID system.

Once you know what items to include in your LoT, an online wishlist is a great way to collect donations and get the community invested in the new LoT.

SoKind is a customizable alternative wishlist and registry site that allows you to register for any kind of gift you might want — new, secondhand, handmade, experiential gifts, donations, or gifts of time or service.

Questions to consider:

- Are there local retailers, manufacturers, or distributors that might donate items to the LoT?
- Will the items withstand heavy use? When possible, source the most durable version.
- Check with the university that the LoT doesn't need any type of liability insurance. In what condition should the item be returned (e.g. clean, full, reset, etc.)?
- Who will manage the LoT inventory? How will items be checked in and out?
- When will the LoT be open?

University of North Florida Example

For the UNF LoT, gently used donations were requested via an email sent to local supporters of partner organizations which linked to a [SoKind wishlist](#). The wishlist included board games, toolsets, stick vacuums, pots/pans and phone chargers. [Read the letter here.](#)

Welcome desk assistants, stationed at the welcome desk of each residence hall, staff the checkout and check-in system. LoT items are placed in containers and stored under office desks or stored within the mail room — both of which can be locked and have security.

Welcome desk assistants require each borrower to have student identification and live in the residence halls. A simple hard copy checkout form was created.

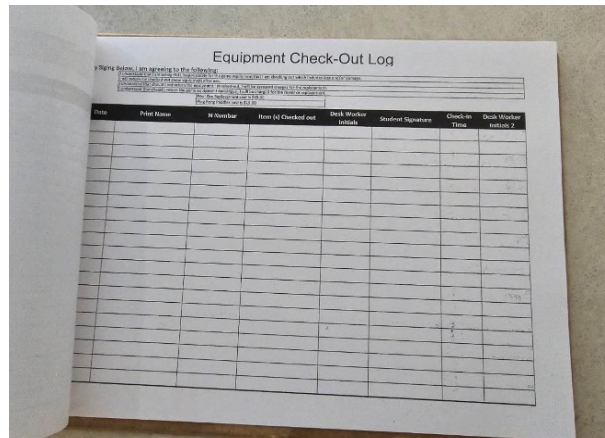
A photograph of a printed form titled "Equipment Check-Out Log". The form includes a header section with instructions and a large table with columns for "Print Name", "ID Number", "Item(s) Checked out", "Desk Worker Initials", "Student Signature", "Check-out Time", and "Desk Worker Initials 2". The table has multiple rows for recording transactions.

Figure 4: Checkout Form Example, Credit: Chandler Poole

5. Communicate Launch

Brainstorm ways to advertise the opening of the campus LoT to create excitement, gather more library donations (if needed and space allows), and raise awareness about the sharing economy via social media, flyers, student media outlets, or classroom announcements. Host a creative launch party like an inaugural board game match, a residence hall room floor dinner, or a repair night to build excitement about and showcase the new resources that will be available.

Questions to consider:

- When and how will the launch of the LoT be advertised?
- What are some ways to generate excitement for these resources?
- How will you communicate with borrowers regarding LoT processes? Is signage needed to help facilitate the logistics?

University of North Florida Example

At UNF, Housing and Residence Life coordinated a launch party at one of the residence hall welcome desks where items can be borrowed. The party included snacks, drinks, and flyers that talked about sharing across campus.

They also posted the announcement on their social media channels. The Center for Biological Diversity created a media advisory that was sent out to all UNF student media outlets announcing the launch.



Figure 5: LoT Launch Party, Credit: UNF Housing and Residence Life



Figure 6: LoT Launch Social Media Announcement, Credit: UNF Housing and Residence Life

6. Track Performance

Keep track of all LoT items to make sure things are returned in working order. Have a plan for replacing items when they are broken or need to be repaired. Keep track of what's used most frequently and potentially adjust your return policy for high-demand items

Questions to consider:

- How will the inventory be tracked?
- How will broken items be noted and repaired/replaced? What repair businesses, organizations, or volunteers can reliably support your needs?
- How will you measure success?

University of North Florida Example

Below are the metrics associated with one residence hall LoT from November 2024 to March 2025. The number of times each item has been checked out is below.

- Games - 1
- Phone chargers - 0
- Pots/pans - 3
- Tools - 3

Library of Things

DATE	PRINT NAME	N#	ITEM BEING CHECKED OUT	STUDENT SIGNATURE	TIME	INITIALS
11/7			VACUUM	[Signature]	5:38	[Initials]
11/8			Tools	[Signature]	7:48	
11-10			Cart	[Signature]	10:48	EP
11-10			Cart	[Signature]	4:47	SPS
11-11			Tape measure	[Signature]	3:09	HO
11-16			cards, foil army	Isabella Clark	2:56	7:42
11/16			Vacuum	[Signature]	5:10	5:25
11/18			Vacuum	[Signature]		
11/18			Vacuum	[Signature]	1:42	7:07
11/18			Blk pot	[Signature]	6:06	

DATE	PRINT NAME	N#	ITEM BEING CHECKED OUT	STUDENT SIGNATURE	TIME	INITIALS
11/20			VACUUM	[Signature]	4:25	
02/03			Cart	[Signature]	1:25pm	
2/6			screwdriver	[Signature]	11:57	
02/07			BROOM	[Signature]	11:55	
			Vacuum	[Signature]	6:07	JP
			Cart	[Signature]	6:17	Z6
2/9/25			Vacuum	[Signature]	3:09	3:38
2/10			BROOM	[Signature]	09:37	
02/20			BROOM	[Signature]	09:00	
			CART	[Signature]	10:31	10:58
			pot	[Signature]	7:18	JS
			pot	[Signature]	9:11	
02/23/25			BROOM	[Signature]	12:53	
03/14/25			VACUUM	[Signature]	1:19	
03/15						
3/23			Cart	[Signature]	3:50	4:06

Figure 7: LoT Checkout Form With Five Months of Data, Credit: UNF Housing and Residence Life

RESOURCES

[Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment and Rating System \(STARS\)](#)

[Center for Biological Diversity Library of Things webpage](#)

[Shareable: How-to-Share](#)— List of community how-to guides

[Shareable: Library of Things Toolkit](#)— General toolkit on how to build a Library of Things

[Shareable: Library of Things Co-Lab](#)— Information about the Library of Things co-lab